

# Equipment Failure

## Can Occur When You Least Expect It!

By AD2 Jonathan Ujvary

It was the start of the second month of cruise and a typical day at sea. Since this was my second deployment and things were going as scheduled, I thought today would be another routine day. After my normal 0500 wakeup and morning regimen, I went to the morning meeting, checked out my tools, and headed for the flight deck to perform foreign object damage (FOD) checks on the squadron HH-60H helicopter that was scheduled for the morning launch.

I climbed up to the rotor head and began inspecting my area of responsibility. Things were off to a typical start until chaos broke out in the hummer hole. I noticed a big flash of light on the flight deck below. The AE's from the embarked VAW squadron had connected an electrical power cord and an extension cable to the E-2C Hawkeye to perform system checks before the call for starts. As their line division LPO applied power at the bulkhead, the cable junction ignited.

To my surprise, I was the only one who noticed the rapidly growing inferno. The three technicians inside the E-2C aircraft had no idea of the danger occurring outside and around their aircraft. The plane captains were busy preparing the aircraft for the launch. Because of the distance to the switch, the line LPO could not see it, either. I knew I had to act immediately to help my shipmates.

I had seen my flight-deck coordinator on my way to the flight deck, so I knew he was nearby. Luckily, when I looked down, he was standing at the tail of our aircraft. I yelled to him, "Fire ... it's on fire," and I pointed at the cable. I then quickly climbed down from the helicopter. The flight-deck coordinator instructed me to "kill the power" as he quickly ran behind the



island and grabbed a CO<sub>2</sub> bottle. I ran over to the line LPO, who was puzzled by my frantic approach. He still was unaware of the flaming cable. I reached past him and quickly secured the power.

Once the power was secured, the blue dragon was reduced to a simple Class A fire. The flight-deck coordinator extinguished the burning rubber, and I ran back

to notify the technicians inside the aircraft. Everyone exited the aircraft safely, and we reported the incident to flight-deck control. Afterward, we all gathered to inspect the cables and to ponder the cause of the fire.

All applicable precautions had been followed. So, why did this mishap occur? Was it preventable? What went wrong? Equipment failure! The technician properly had inspected both electrical cables before connecting them, but they still were inadequate for the job. The cables were connected properly, and no contaminants were present.

Through training and teamwork, we were able to prevent this small electrical fire from becoming a major flight-deck catastrophe. By acting quickly and decisively, we prevented possible damage to the ship, the loss of an aircraft, and possibly saved the lives of the three shipmates inside.

Equipment failure can occur when you least expect it. Training, teamwork and attention to detail are the tools for success during emergencies. These types of mishaps only are prevented by vigilant performance of periodic maintenance, pre-op inspection, and replacement of defective equipment. ✂

AD2 Jonathan Ujvary was assigned to HS-5 "NIGHTDIPPERS" on detachment aboard USS *George Washington* (CVN-73). Senior Chief Wagner was the flight-deck coordinator and also was a member of HS-5.

*Situational awareness should always involve more than just your immediate area of responsibility.—Ed.*